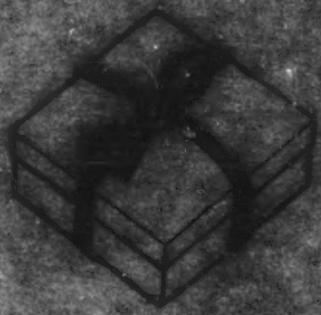
INTRICACIES AND EMBELLISHMENTS
objects designed from the heart



SUBMITTED BY PAMELA PIKE

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*In a small handcart, which he has cobbled together himself from odds and ends, he transports the stones he intends to set... He also conveys, hooked into the loops of his belt, a mallet and a number of small chisels. His tools, his music, his offering -- he carries all that he needs on his body. Where my mother's solitary gravestone once sat, now rises a hollow tower some thirty feet in height and still growing... my father chooses to decorate the stone surfaces with elaborate cipher, even though Tyndall stone, with its mottled colouring, is thought to be resistant to fine carving... the act of carving never ceases to be a labour for him -- the whole of his body bends into the effort... Only when he finishes a piece and carries it to the site of the tower does he experience the fever of transcendence...*

*the tower he built to his wife's memory, a tower constructed with his own hands.* [1]

## Introduction

Pam Pike's selection of work points out that the giving of a gift is often an important element in relationships of many different kinds. By choosing gifts which were made by hand, she mirrors the intimacies of giving and the intimacies of making. Her theme invites us to look at the act of art-making in a different light, one in which the demanding glare of aesthetic rigour is balanced by the softer radiance of a personal connection. The authority of the hand as an innately expressive tool is reinforced in this fine show.

Thirty seven pieces by nineteen people from across the province and beyond are featured in the exhibition which marks the re-opening of the Mary E Black Gallery after a hiatus of four months.

Chris Tyler
Manager of Crafts, Design, and Publishing Programmes
Cultural Affairs Section

## Intricacies and Endearments: objects designed from the heart

I remember that, as a child I would visit, almost daily, my grandmother. She lived directly across the road from me. She always had lots of cookies, cakes and pies. My grandmother and I would sit beside her big wood burning cook stove and talk. She would sit with her legs extended out and crossed, a book in hand. Her pure blue eyes would be animated and her voice would be cheerful and warm. I would eat my cookies and my grandmother would share brief but lively accounts of the book she was reading. She loved to describe the characters and landscapes.

It is only now that I realize the gifts that reading gave to my grandmother. In books my grandmother was able to find her own voice. My grandmother's passion for reading was instilled in me. Her companionship and love was one of the best gifts that I have received. Up until she died, I made her small things and shared my findings of precious books. She made me things too. I keep them in a storage box along with all of her diaries.

*Tonight I will begin The Underpainter, the last canvas of the series, a portrait of myself. In it, I will carefully detail both of my inheritances. Every piece of reconstructed china on the shelves that mar the famous modernist architect's cold and empty walls. Each object and all the histories contained by Sara's house... And when it is finished, I will want to keep it close to me so that I may look at the images there, from time to time.* [2]

Stories, memories, relationships define our lives. Some are intricate and endearing, some are passionate and adventurous, others are quiet and subdued. Regardless of these fortunes in our lives, we give of ourselves, of things, of time.

The act of giving is always connected to a story, memory, time, person. We give gifts as a way of expressing our own feelings towards another. Sometimes we give gifts as a social-based custom, Christmas, Easter, Birthday or perhaps as a ritual marker of time or occasion, weddings, baby showers, career advancements, graduations.

When a gift is made by our own hands it seems to have even more significance. We make gifts because we want it to be special, one-of-a-kind, carefully designed and crafted for the recipient. We make gifts because we wander for hours, from store to store, looking for that one particular object that expresses our feelings, only to find nothing catches our eye. Sometimes we make gifts because of economic restraints. We also make gifts because we are creative and skilled. The gift and its presentation will live long as a memorable occasion and an endearing keepsake.

The exhibition *Intricacies and Endearments: objects designed from the heart* is about the making of unique one-of-a-kind objects intended as gifts, the stories surrounding these objects and the relationship between the giver and the recipient. Nineteen artists and crafts people were selected to present their works. In all thirty-seven works are featured in the exhibition.

Celebrating the arrival of a new born baby often inspires the need to mark time and, for some parents, friends, grandmothers, the desire to make a keepsake of sorts for the baby. While sitting in the waiting room of a Bermuda hospital, anxiously awaiting the birth of her granddaughter, Dawn MacNutt pieced together a small quilt. Following the completion of *Emma's Blanket*, MacNutt made a book highlighting the story of Emma's birth and the origin of the fabrics and imagery.

Over the years Joleen Gordon has knitted many circular blankets for many babies. The blankets are made for family members and friends, and are usually given to first-time mothers. The blankets are knitted with baby sayelle yarn in alternating colours of pink, white, blue, white. The tradition of making the blankets was passed down to Gordon and is now being passed on to her daughters.

For Kathryn Belzer, making an object from the heart was an opportunity. *Baby Ando's Magic Box* was commissioned by Ando Hirschbach's parents, both of them artists. The cloth box was made with photo-transferred images of Ando's father in a comedy troupe. The box is soft inside, the outside is textured and tactile.

Good friends are often our chosen family. The birthday present that Maura Donovan gave to her friend, Susan Atkinson is quite fragile, that if the bottle was turned upside down or on its side, many layers of sand inside would be destroyed. *For Sue, the bottle that said "Sussex Beverage Company" was perfect, because Sussex, New Brunswick, is her hometown. I tried to incorporate sand from beaches that I knew she had visited, as well as ones that made the best colour contrast.* Attached to the bottle is a note listing the origin of each sand layer.

Lois Loewen created a small relief print based on a passage written by her close friend and writer, Julie Vandervroot. The print was given to Vandervroot for her birthday. In Vandervroot's story, *Power Lines* (1998), Loewen refers to this passage: *I was halfway through law school when I learned that the horse and buffalo were once the same creature. That is, there exists a sort of prototype out of which the horse and the buffalo evolved and went their separate ways. The woman who told me this suggested that this may have happened because there are two good strategies for survival. One is to run like hell, flat out, as fast as you can. The other is to stand your ground in such a way that the intended charge at you feels futile.* Loewen made an image of a buffalo, standing its ground.

Sometimes a gift that is made for a friend is simply a way of showing support and appreciation. Beverley McInnes made a purse for a close friend, whose husband was diagnosed with Parkinson's a few years back and is now confined to a wheel chair. The purse *A Welter of Images* was well considered: it echoes the palette that her friend likes and its origins are based on the legend of the Gordian Knot. *The ends of the knot lay hidden until the sword revealed their structure; yet the rope remained strong and useful as it lay on the ground.*

Combining strengths, one in writing poetry and the other in making drypoint prints, led to the making of a small book enclosed in a leather box. Rita Lamontagne MacDonald presented this gift to her dear friend, Joan Wilson. Lamontagne MacDonald's images are about traits passed down through generations. Wilson wrote poetry based on these ideas.

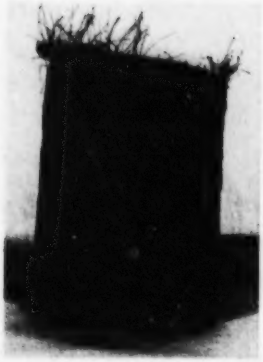
Valda Kemp and several other family members from her mother's side, each created a square for a quilt that was given to her parents on the occasion of their 50th wedding anniversary. The finished squares were returned to her mother who then pieced them together. Numerous methods and materials were used to make the squares: applique, embroidery, cross-stitch, antique lace and fabric paint.

Nothing is more endearing and magical than gifts that bring out the child in us. Norbert Wozniak is the *Santa Man*, hand carving and painting Santa Claus' every year since 1990, for his two daughters Linda Carey and Susan McNeil. Each Santa Claus is one-of-a-kind and exquisitely detailed, relative to each daughters' life. Two years ago when Carey and her partner got a puppy, Wozniak made her a Santa holding a sack with a puppy dog sticking out of it, and for McNeil, Wozniak made a Scottish Santa with bagpipes. Her partner plays the pipes. Sixteen Santas are featured in the exhibition. This is Wozniak's first exhibition.

In the fall of 1999 Denise Ainsworth, her sister Aileen Osborn and a friend took a memorable trip together to Northern Spain. They walked the old pilgrim road from Pamplona to Santiago. The walk was tiring as it required a lot of energy. The sisters enjoyed seeing the various castles, cathedrals and monasteries that they passed en route. To commemorate such a fascinating trip Ainsworth decided to make a screen for her sister. Each painted panel depicts a building that they had viewed. Ainsworth's sister has an avid interest in architecture.

Learning a new technique while also expecting to make something special is a risk that Leora Johnson took when she turned a wood peppermint jar for her father's birthday. In using the lathe, Johnson opened up a new door to making things. The jar is finely made for a first-time wood turner.

Young people truly in love are a joy to witness. Recent graduates David Scott and Susan Parmley initially met in 1997 at the School of Architecture at Dalhousie University. In the fall of 1997, Scott and Parmley lived in different cities while on work term. As Christmas was approaching each had decided to make the other a



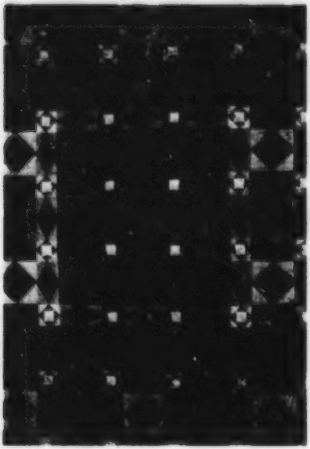
**CLOCKWISE: LEFT PAGE**

LUIGI COSTANZO - SCULPTURE

RITA LAMONTAGNE MACDONALD - BOOK

ELIZABETH GOLUCH - CARD

KATHRYN BELZER - BOX

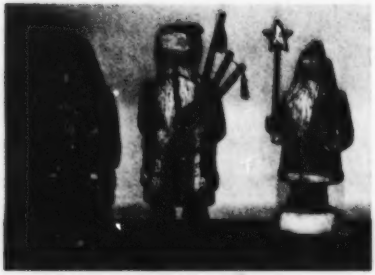


**CLOCKWISE: RIGHT PAGE**

DAVID SCOTT - QUILT

SUSAN PARMLEY - QUILT

NORBERT WOZNIAK - SANTAS



ALL IMAGES
COURTESY OF THE ARTISTS.

present. Both were amused and surprised to find a quilt under the tree. Scott and Parmley were first-time quilt makers. Perhaps being in love dares us to take risks. Scott's patch work quilt that he gave to Parmley is recycled from wool coats. It is composed of large random-sized bold blocks of solid red, grey and navy blue. There is a striking similarity of colours used in both quilts. The quilt that Parmley made for Scott is more formal and patterned. It is composed of small pieces of squares enclosed by diamond shapes and diamond shapes encircled by squares. Scott's quilt is bold, while Parmley's is intricately detailed.

Simon DiVincenzo and his fianceé, Cecilia Nin, also met at the School of Architecture at Dalhousie University. Their amusing story is original and touching. DiVincenzo, while still wooing Nin, decided one day to leave a trail of red roses, with the last rose hanging on her apartment door. Nin was at school working under a very tight deadline. Usually she went home for lunch. However that day she ate at school. Her roommate desperately tried to urge her to go home but Nin was diligent about her work. Many of her friends knew that there was a trail of roses waiting for her. Late in the evening, tired and exhausted, Nin went home and found the one remaining rose on her door. All of the others had been taken. Amusingly, this story still floats around the school. That one rose was dried and framed, a testament to love's unusual path.

Sweethearts Kristen Welton and Saul Becker were introduced by the sea when Becker sailed into Halifax on the tall ship H.M.C.S. Rose. They wrote letters for one year and then decided that they should live together. Becker is a recent MFA graduate of NSCAD and Welton is a M. Arch. graduate from Dalhousie University. Recently they celebrated their five year anniversary and, while travelling in Lisbon, they both unknowingly commissioned the same jeweller to make a gift for the other. *We were both quite surprised to see the same box mirrored in each other's hand. Saul had commissioned a necklace carved from an Austrian Shilling. Two similar coins sandwiched together form a box which houses a topaz stone. His birthstone. Similarily, I commissioned an earring carved from an old Portugese*

*coin... the earring is one of the sails from Vasco da Gama's ship. If you look closely you can see the Portugese sheild in the center of the sail. Behind the sail is an opal, my birthstone.*

Leo McNeil's object from the heart is not sugared with romance and soul-mate-ish connections but instead it is a story of a relationship that has spanned many years. In 1992 McNeil made a small covered bowl out of Cape Breton stone for his wife's birthday. Turning stone is an intensive labour of love

We rarely make gifts for ourselves. Beverley McInnes made herself a purse that is based on a trip that she took recently to the Middle East and a trip that her mother took in the 1920's. The story of the purse *Egyptian Reticule* is very endearing. It begins with her father, a doctor, and an avid needlepointer. Then it describes the little black book containing line drawings and horizons of the Middle East, compiled by her own mother. McInnes then leads to her own visit to the Middle East and her reading of a biography of Gertrude Bell, a nomadic explorer and mapper of the Arabian Desert. The purse is a homage to her inspiring parents.

In 1987 Luigi Costanzo visited his father in New Mexico. His father was quite sick with cancer and Costanzo was struck by the fragile nature of his father's life. While at church Costanzo sat beside his father and drew an image of his father's fragile body and from within that body, a childs face smiled outward. When they returned home his father suggested that he make a sculpture of the drawing. Constanzo made an emotionally charged sculpture in aluminium and bronze. The outer full-sized portrait in aluminium is aged and wrought with jagged holes. Inside the full-sized portrait is a small portrait in bronze of an innocent looking child. Costanzo states that, *I owe this sculpture to my dad's challenge but also to his example of inner strength and perservence in the midst of turmoil. In a way this sculpture represents my Dad's gift to me.*

The custom of sending 'thank you' notes seems almost non-existent. However Elizabeth Goluch has reinvented these notes and made two wonderful

cards/packages for friends. *The Pill Bug Thank You Card*, given to Ann and Barry Birks is a hinged copper three-dimensional card shaped as a pill bug. Opened, it reveals a thank you on hand made paper. *The Underwing Moth Thank You Card*, sent to Adriane Abbott, is an envelope made of watercolour paper, hand stained and stitched. Buttons used as fasteners are also sewn on the envelope. It contains a card resembling an Underwing Moth. The card opens to reveal the note inside.

The work offers a wide sampling of both traditional and contemporary methods --wood turning and carving, quilting, knitting, sculpture, printmaking, jewellery. Other offerings are treasured remnants of a gift given-- a dried rose, cards that say 'thank you' better than Hallmark. For some of the artists, a new skill was tried and, for some, even evolved into an ongoing craft. Whatever the methods and techniques used, the works are memorable, usually woven around stories of closeness between family and between friends, stories of travel and adventure, stories of young lovers bonding, stories of hardship and support, stories of welcoming new life into the world.

Pamela Pike
January 2001

## Notes

1. Carol Shields. The Stone Diaries. Pp. 63-65 and P. 85.
2. Jane Urquhart. The Underpainter. Pp. 339-340.


## Acknowledgements

The curator would like to thank all of the artists and craftspeople, the fortunate receivers of precious gifts and the Mary E Black Gallery. Magic still exists.


## Curator's Bio

Pamela Pike is an artist and curator, and most recently owner of the small business, Wild Indigo Design (garden design and graphic design services). She continues to work as Director/Curator of Exhibitions at the Faculty of Architecture at Dalhousie University.

## List of Work in Exhibition

All works are in centimetres, height precedes length, precedes width.

**Denise Ainsworth**
El Camino de Santiago (a walk along the old pilgrim route in Northern Spain)
lacquered wood screen, oil on panel, overall size 175.3 x 86.4, panels (15) 25.4 x 20.3, 2000, *gift to Aileen Osborn, sister, celebration of trip taken together*

**Saul Becker**
Necklace, coins, silver, topaz, string, 2.6 x 2, 2000, *gift commissioned for Kristen Welton, significant other, 5 year anniversary*

**Kathryn Belzer**
Baby Ando's Magic Box, appliqué, photo transfer, embroidery, 20.3 x 10.6 x 5.1, 1989, *gift commissioned for Ando Hirschbach, birth*

**Luigi Costanzo**
The Child Within, sculpture, cast bronze, aluminum, 43.2 x 33 x 33, drawing 60.1 x 40.7, 1987, *gift to self*

**Simon DiVincenzo**
Trail of Red Roses, dried rose, 1999, *gift to Cecilia Nin, fianceé*

**Maura Donovan**
Bottle with Sand, bottle, sand, card, 23 x 6, 2000, *gift to Susan Atkinson, friend, birthday*

**Elizabeth Goluch**
Underwing Moth Thank You Card, watercolour paper, paint, buttons, embroidery cotton, leather, 7.6 x 10.2, 1999, *gift to Adriane Abbott, thank you*

Pill Bug Thank You Card, hand-made paper, copper rivets, copper, 7.6 x 10.2, 1999, *gift to Ann and Barry Birks, thank you*

**Joleen Gordon**
Knitted Circular Blanket, knitted baby sayelle yarn, crocheted edge, 91.4 diametre, 2000 *gift to first-time mother*

**Leora G. Johnson**
Pa's Peppermint Jar, turned wood, 12 x 10, 2000, *gift to Gary Johnson, father, birthday*

**Valda Kemp (and family)**
Family Quilt, fabric with appliqué, embroidery, cross-stitch, antique lace, paint, 66 x 66, *gift to Adolf and Elizabete Svenne, parents, 50th Wedding Anniversary*

**Rita Lamontagne MacDonald**
The Humours: Sanguine, book, leather box, drypoint prints, overall size 4 x 36 x 21, 1999, *gift to Joan Wilson, friend*

**Lois Loewen**
Buffalo Print, relief print, 8.9 x 14, 2000, *gift to Julie Vandervoort, friend, birthday*

**Leo MacNeil**
Covered Bowl, turned stone, 5.7 x 8.3 diametre, 1992 , *gift to Mary MacNeil, wife, birthday*

**Dawn MacNutt**
Emma's Blanket, storybook and appliqué quilt, cotton and silk, hand crocheted lace, hand printed fabric, 122 x 84, 1993, *gift to Emma Caitlin Burrows, grandaughter, birth*

**Beverley McInnes**
A Welter of Images, purse, couched gold cord, beaded on panne velvet ground, 22.9 x 20.3, 1999, *gift to a friend, support and appreciation*

Egyptian Reticule, purse, embellishments, ecru mono canvas, 22.9 x 20.3,1997, *gift to self*

**Susan Parmley**
Quilt, stitched cotton, 172.7 x 132.1, 1997, *gift to David Scott, significant other, Christmas*

**David Scott**
Quilt, pieces stitched from used wool coats, buttons, 213.4 x 162.6, 1997, *gift to Susan Parmley, significant other, Christmas*

**Kristen Welton**
Earring, coin, opal, 14 karat gold, 2000, *gift commissioned for Saul Becker, significant other, 5 year anniversary*

**Norbert Wozniak**
Santas, (16), handcarved and painted wood, sizes range from 10.2 - 30.5 high, 1990- 2000, *gifts to Linda Carey and Susan McNeil, daughters, Christmas past*